

Hacienda La Puente issues 97 layoff notices to adult-education employees

James Wagner, Staff Writer

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The Hacienda La Puente Unified school board voted unanimously to issue final layoff notices to 97 adult-school employees in two programs, essentially cutting one for Los Angeles County jail inmates.

The district, which faces a \$5 million shortfall for the upcoming school year, opted to trim back its adult education program at a special meeting Tuesday morning.

About 70 percent of the layoff notices will affect teachers in the jail program, said William Roberts IV, assistant superintendent of human resources.

The jail education program serves 30,000 inmates across all the county jails.

Both moves will save about \$9 million, according to district estimates.

"Overall our school district has been more successful than most in staving layoffs and cuts,"

board member Jay Chen said. "But in this case unfortunately we couldn't."

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Administrators said they were responding to cuts to state funding for adult education and a pending lawsuit against the jail program.

The district's contract to provide teaching to inmates ends in June, and with no new contract in place, school officials said they needed to act and send the layoff notices now.

In fall 2009, the district was sued along with the county and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department by an advocacy group alleging that special education wasn't provided to inmates, school officials said.

School officials said the current contract doesn't include special

education for inmates.

"Providing special ed to 30,000 inmates would bankrupt the district," said Cynthia Parulan-Colfer, associate superintendent for adult and continuing education. "So as a protective

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measure, if we don't get a contract that protects the district legally, we won't continue the contract with the L.A. County jails."

The funding for it "would come out of the district's general fund and you can't take away classes from second graders," Parulan-Colfer said.

Officials said they remain hopeful a deal will be reached with the Sheriff's Department.

Statewide, school districts have been cutting adult education to cope with budget deficits. The Baldwin Park Unified School District recently cut its program by \$3 million.

David Plank, executive director of Policy Analysis for California Education, a research center based at UC Berkeley, USC and Stanford University, said the state has put adult education programs into vulnerable positions.

"Obviously it's a huge problem for adults who are trying to improve their language skills or trying to acquire new vocational skills," he said. "The opportunities are simply no longer there."

Staff Writer Maritza Velazquez contributed to this story.

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